

THE GOD OF BATTLES—BY ROBT. W. CHAMBERS

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ILLUSTRATED BY DAN SAYRE GROESBECK

"It happened so unexpectedly, so abruptly, that she forgot to scream. A moment before she had glanced out of the pantry window and seen the tall oats motionless in the field and the sunlight sifting through the corn. It was scarcely a moment; she bent over her flour pan, wistful, saddened by the summer silence, thinking of her brother; then again she raised her eyes to the window.

It was too sudden; she did not scream. Had they dropped from the sky, these men in blue—these tramping, crowding creatures? The corn was full of them, the pasture, the road; they were in the garden, tearing tendrils from the vines, their great shoes, plodding across the potato hills, and leveling it to a waste of beaten mould and green stuff. They passed, hundreds, thousands—she could not tell—she heard a harmony, subtle, vast as winds at sea—a nameless murmur that sweeps through brains of marching men—the voiceless prophecy of battle.

Breathless, spellbound, she moved on tiptoe to the porch, one hand pressed trembling across her lips. The men in blue covered the earth, the world, her world, which stretched from the orchard to Benson's Hill.

There was something on Benson's Hill that she had never before seen. It looked like a brook in the sunshine; it was a column of infantry, rifles slanting in the sun.

Somebody had been speaking to her a minute or two, and now she looked down and saw a boy, slim, sunburnt. His dusty uniform glittered with yellow braid; he touched his cap and fingered his sword hilt. She looked at him listless, her hand still pressed to her lips.

"Is there a well near the house?" he asked.

Something tugged gently at her

apron, and, "show me the well, please," repeated the boy beside her.

She started and turned trembling to him, but he gravely motioned her on, and she went, passing swiftly under the trees to the vine-covered well-curb.

He thanked her; she pointed at the dipper and rope; but already blue-clad, red-faced soldiers were lowering the bucket.

Soldiers passed in the sunshine. She began to remember that her brother, too, was a soldier, somewhere out in the world; he had been a soldier for nearly a week, ever since Jim Bemis had taken him to Willow Corners to enlist. She remembered that first night, how she had been afraid to sleep in the house, how at dusk she had gone into the parlor to be near her mother. Her mother was dead, but her picture hung in the parlor.

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She began to watch the flags; she saw a regiment plunge into the trampled corn, but she knew it was not her brother's because the trousers of the men were scarlet and the caps hung to the shoulders, tasseled and crimson. As she looked a belt of flame encircled the forest and through the outrushing smoke, the crash! crash! crash! of rifles echoed across the valley.

In the orchard the rattle of the well bucket never ceased. A very young officer sat on his horse, eating an unripe apple and watching the men around the well.

The girl went into the kitchen, reached up for her sun-bonnet, dangling on a peg, tied it under her chin, and walked gravely into the orchard. The very young officer wheeled in his saddle and leaned toward her deferentially as she came up.

Before she spoke she saw that it was the same officer who had asked